

M. butterfly by david
hwang



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

M. Butterfly by David Henry Hwang exemplifies the beliefs the Western world has over the East. Politically, the West believes they can be a dominating force by intervening in all Eastern affairs through the use of weapons.

Socially, Western cultures and traditions have entered the Eastern world, impacting the daily lives of the Chinese people. The white man has displayed inappropriate behavior over the traditional oriental woman by controlling every aspect of her life. In Hwang's M.

Butterfly, there is an evident struggle between the dominator and those that are being dominated on a political and social level, with an additional conflict between gender roles. The prevalence of Western imperialism in China during the 1960s, completely altered and transformed the lives of the old cultured Chinese. However, during the reign of Communist Mao Zedong and the initiation of the Cultural Revolution, the pleasures of the foreign, western world were eliminated. During a brief conversation in the Peking Opera, Song Liling says, " How I wish there were even a tiny cafe to sit in.

With cappuccinos, and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz". Because of this, Rene Gallimard and the audience can infer that the Chinese enjoyed the lifestyle of a Westerner such as, eating at out door cafes and attending local nightclubs. Throughout Chinese homes, there was a clash and fusion of cultures, a battle between the old and the new. In Song and Gallimard's shared flat, located on the outskirts of Peking, China, the decor consisted of a mixture between Western furniture and Chinese antiques.

Politically speaking, the Chinese only want to be correlated with the Western country that has the most dominance and control in the world. As the newly

appointed vice-counsel for the French embassy, Gallimard has the duty to head the revamped intelligence division. Acting as the “ eyes and ears” for the French embassy, it is Gallimard’s responsibility to convey the opinions and desires of the Chinese. Because of this, he relays to French ambassador Toulon, “ They want the good things we can give them... The Orientals will always submit to a greater force”.

The Chinese have fallen victim to the greater influence of Western imperialists, depending on these larger nations for survival. Throughout the course of M. Butterfly, Gallimard struggles on how to properly portray an imperialistic, foreign devil. Beginning at a young age, Marc, Gallimard’s childhood friend, who can be interpreted as the ideal Western man, attempts to convince Gallimard to treat women with dominance and power. Marc’s description of the young college girls, “ On trucks. Packed in like sardines.

The back flips open, babes hop out... ” , insinuates the idea the women can be treated as a herd of animals. Marc continues further on by explaining to Gallimard that he can touch any girl he wants with his eyes closed, in a dark space. Marc’s improper description on how to be an imperialist man may have been one of the factors as to why Gallimard can recognize who Song is, at the end of the play, solely through the use of his hands. In meeting Song, Gallimard finally has the perfect woman, one that will be completely submissive to him.

In knowing that Song has fallen in love with him, Gallimard begins to avoid her, abusing his new found power and dominance. However, after weeks of separation and the revelation that Song has revealed herself completely to

him, Gallimard cannot live up to the ideals of the imperialistic man and thus, feels guilty for the pain he has caused Song. Gallimard fails to notice the control and power he actually has in his marriage with Helga. When faced with the decision to have a child or not, Helga says, “ Only if you want a child, Rene”.

Helga’s biddable decision to give Gallimard control over whether or not they should have a child together is odd due to the fact that, biologically, any woman can decide to have a child, even if against her husband’s will. In the end, Gallimard was unable to become a foreign devil and has assimilated to the Chinese culture. In returning to France, Gallimard begins to use incense burners, a Chinese custom, considers the French to be smelly people, and reverses the roles by becoming the passive Butterfly. For Gallimard, Song represents the model Oriental woman, one that is passive and obedient.

Ideally, however, Song personifies the characteristics of a Western woman, or man in the end of the play, that is dominating and aggressive in all aspects of life. “ The Whole World Over,” depicts the story of Gallimard and Song, however it is Song who in the end leaves Gallimard, “ The Yankee travels, casting his anchor wherever he wants. Life’s not worth living unless he can win the hearts of the fairest maidens, then hotfoot it off the premises ASAP”. From their first encounters together, Song portrays obvious mannerisms of an authoritative woman. She takes the first initiative to approach Gallimard at the ambassador’s house, suggests that Gallimard’s feelings for Song may be mutual, and calls Gallimard during the early morning, confessing that she could no longer wait to speak with him. These actions are those that would not be taken by any traditional Oriental woman.

In the bed room, Song takes on the role of constantly pleasing Gallimard, with no favors done in return on Gallimard's behalf. Ironically, Gallimard did not enjoy losing his virginity to a young woman that was controlling and authoritative.

Upon learning that Song is a man, more Western qualities that Song possesses are revealed. Song was able to manipulate Gallimard's feelings by telling Gallimard the things he wanted to hear. As Song states in the courtroom, " Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes", describes the idea of rape mentality Western men have about Oriental women. It is Song who uses the concept of rape mentality against Gallimard at the end of the play. Additionally, Song has also acquired the material aspects of the Western world when she states, " These are Armani slacks.. " while Gallimard becomes an Oriental, and dresses himself in a kimono.

The reversal of roles, in addition to the battle for the imperialistic power in the relationship, completely redefines the structure of Gallimard and Song's relationship. Affected by the political aspects of the China, Song represents herself as a vulnerable Chinese woman. Gallimard, not realizing the governmental information Song was acquiring throughout the course of their relationship, fails to realize the abuse of power Song acquires over him. It is not until the end of the play where Gallimard completely submits himself to the dominating factor and commits suicide in order to continue living in a fantasy world.